



**Rocky Mountain Incident Management Team A
Nebraska Emergency Management Agency and
Sheridan County Public Information**



Joint Information Center (JIC)

Sept. 3, 2012, 2:15a p.m. MDT

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RUSHVILLE, NEBRASKA -- Firefighters on the Wellnitz fire in northwest Sheridan County Nebraska and Southwest Shannon County in South Dakota got some good news at their Monday morning briefing. Incident Commander Todd Richardson told the weary crews that if containment efforts continued apace throughout the day some local firefighters might be released this evening. Local crews will be released first because they have been on the fire line the longest.

Officials identified two areas where significant remaining "heat" is a concern. One is near the Oglala Reservoir in South Dakota where dried reeds and cattails continue to smolder. The other areas of "heat" concern is in the pine timber of the southeast quadrant of the fire zone in Sheridan County Nebraska south of the intersection of 370 Trail and 430 Trail.

The Incident Team Safety Officer warned firefighters of the danger of downed power lines in the fire zone. Power to some lines has been shut off but the damage is so wide spread that officials don't have a clear picture of which downed lines have been secured. Firefighters and returning residents should consider any downed power line to be "hot" until it is secured.

Sheridan County Road Superintendent Tom Kuester reported that gravel roads in the fire zone and surrounding areas have been badly damaged by the heavy traffic. Road surfaces were already compromised by the extreme drought. Fire traffic has caused some large "blow-outs" and has further aggravated "wash board" conditions. Road surfaces are especially bad along 450 Lane (Beaver Wall Road) north of Hay Springs and along 640 Road and 370 Trail west of Highway 87.

Kuester asks that all non-essential traffic avoid these roads until repairs can be made. If county equipment and crews are released from the fire line road repair will begin tomorrow.

Twenty-two soldiers in the Nebraska Army National Guard's Chadron-based 1057th light/medium truck company remain on the fire lines while the remaining 12 remain in Chadron to work on equipment.

Air Operations

- Dropping water and foam as needed.

Road Closures

- For up-to-date road closures call www.511.nebraska.gov or call 511
- All state highways are open in the northern panhandle. Watch for fire fighters, smoke and wild fire.
- Smoke can rapidly reduce visibility.
- There may be intermittent road closures because of the response.

Safety Message

- Fire officials request that members of the public stay off county roads to keep them clear for firefighting efforts.

Evacuations:

- No evacuation orders are in place at the current time.

Weather Report

- Weather conditions look a little bit better in the area today with forecast highs in the low 90's and somewhat more moderate winds out of the northwest. Afternoon winds may gust to 25.

Start Date:

- Aug. 29, approximately 5 p.m.

Start Location:

- 10 miles north of Hays Springs/Rushville

Containment:

- 27 percent

Cause:

- Lightning

Acreage:

- 77,159 -- An aerial survey Sunday resulted in a more accurate number of acreage affected.
- 44,159 in Nebraska,
- 33,000 in South Dakota

Personnel: 350

- **Cooperating Agencies in Nebraska:** Sheridan County, Region 23 Emergency Management, Sheridan County Sheriff's Department, State of Nebraska, Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, Nebraska National Guard, State Fire Marshal's Wildland Incident Response Assistance Team, Nebraska State Patrol, Department of Roads and Department of Environmental Quality, Nebraska Forest Service, Farmer's COOP, Cities of Rushville, Gordon and Hays Springs, 72nd Civil Support Team, Cherry Country Roads, American Red Cross, Southern Baptist -- Oregon Trail Baptist Association, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Pine Ridge Indian Reservation,

Crews: 3**Engines: 71 apparatus****Injuries: No new injuries****Aviation:**

- 2 South Dakota National Guard Blackhawk helicopters
- 1 Bell 407
- 1 Astar helicopter
- 1 Nebraska National Guard CH-47

Structures destroyed: 2 homes, 2 commercial properties destroyed and 24 outbuildings**Volunteer Fire Departments:**

- **39 departments have responded to the fire in Nebraska** -- Ainsworth, Ansley, Atkinson, Axtell, Bassett, Bayard, Burwell, Casper, Cody Rural Fire, Curtis, Dalton, Edison, Elm Creek, Gordon, Hay Springs, Heart of the Hills, Hyannis, Keya Paha Co. RF, Kilgore, Maxwell, Merriman, Minatare, Minden, Morrill, North Platte, O'Neill, Oxford, Paxton, Red Willow Western, Rushville, Sargent, Sidney, Stuart, Thedford, Valentine, Wallace, Willsonville and Woodlake